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## RADICALISM IN FRANCE.

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### I.

POLITICAL parties have at least one trait in common with dramatic writers—that is, their extreme repugnance to recognize that almost always their defeats should be laid to their own faults. It is extremely rare, indeed, for an author to explain his want of success otherwise than as due to the incapability of the actors, or to the rain or snow, or to excessive heat, or to some other climatic condition apt to exert an unfavorable influence on the public. Undoubtedly it would be much simpler to admit that the piece was hissed solely because it was poor ; but that is the last explanation of which the unfortunate playwright will dream.

In the same way parties, when they behold public opinion abandoning them, never look upon this general defection as a direct consequence of their own detestable policy ; on the contrary, they exert all their ingenuity to discover remote causes, of a machiavelic and most complicated nature, and thus free themselves from the necessity of admitting their own errors and allow themselves to continue in them. For example, no one can ever make the Opportunist faction admit that, if the late defenders of the Monarchical idea in France have, during the last few years, regained part of the ground which they had lost in 1877, it is due exclusively to the unpardonable faults committed by the coterie which seized the power, and to the powerless condition in which the Radical party has found itself in the last two legislatures.

The 16th of May had found all the Republicans up and united for the defense of the Republic. This masquerade of a *coup d'état* over, the people, who had suffered from it during seven months, had perhaps a right to expect from the Republic, now regaining the upper hand, something different from a counterfeit of the grotesque *régime* which had just fallen to pieces. People said :

“Well, at last we are going to find out what a Republican government is.” But, we have found out nothing whatever; and, from all appearances, we shall be yet a good while in the same ignorance. MM. de MacMahon, de Broglie, and their accomplices, in a few months, had brought two thousand five hundred suits against the press, without counting hundreds of prosecutions against railway employees who were charged with being colporteurs of newspapers under the guise of merely gathering up the loose sheets left in the cars by the passengers. Twenty-five hundred lawsuits! This truly was a fine figure, and it was difficult to surpass it; nor has it been attempted. But, if they are less numerous now than in 1877, the political trials are really quite as ridiculous, with the difference that they are more odious. The journalists imprisoned by M. de Broglie were never dragged, handcuffed, into jails prepared to receive them; yet, such is the treatment borne by two of the writers for the Radical Socialist press. The trials of the 16th of May were by the Empire, and the prosecutions by the Opportunist Republic are of the 16th of May. The label is altered, but the methods of action are exactly the same. Is it wonderful, then, that the people who witness a constant postponing of the promised reforms, and who listen, disheartened, to the repeated eulogies of men whom they have trusted, have no longer that generous confidence and enthusiastic faith which they manifested ten years ago? Assuredly, this result is lamentable; but who should be blamed if not those who, holding an undisputed power, have not even kept a single one of the engagements which they had made while they were members of the opposition?

At present the Radicals are charged with having sown disunion among the Republicans, and of having by their secession compromised the Republic itself. For my part, I do not believe that in France the republican form of government is in danger; the election of two hundred Monarchical deputies is merely an accident which I will explain by and by; it has not the threatening signification which people seek to attach to it. But if we wish justly to divide up the responsibilities which have been incurred, it is proper to recall, in the first place, the rôle played these last years by the two principal factions of the democratic party. The actual position of the Radicals, and the future which is without doubt reserved for them, will quite naturally follow from this simple *exposé*.

## II.

Let us suppose that a foreigner, little familiar with our internal affairs, should have the luck to meet an honest man on his way—there are some such to be met here and there—and put this question to him :

“ Would you tell me what they mean in this country by the word ‘ Radicalism,’ and why a certain number of your compatriots raise their hands to heaven, and with plaintive shrieks, like the osprey, declare solemnly that France is lost, every time that it is proposed to call to power those whom you style ‘ Radicals’ ? ”

It is certain that the Frenchman of good faith, whose existence I have ventured to suppose, would not hesitate to reply in the most civil manner possible :

“ Well, sir, we understand by *Radicalism* the body of political doctrines which the Republican party has constantly professed, and of social reforms which it has unceasingly demanded, up to the moment when a fraction of this party, having attained to power, was placed in a position to apply the one and realize the other.”

This reply, the sincerity of which leaves nothing further to be desired, would perhaps somewhat astonish the foreigner, who might thus pursue his interrogatory :

“ The Radicals, if I understand you rightly, are then those Republicans who have remained faithful to the principles heretofore defended by the democratic opposition ? But the others—

“ The others have discovered that the holding of public offices, with all that it brings of honor and of emolument, was well worth the making of some concessions ; and they have got rid of their convictions of the past, which were beginning to become irksome. Feeling, moreover, that power, which is often disagreeable and always oppressive to those who have to bear it, is full of charm for those who exercise it, they have made in all simplicity a public display of their wishes and their expectations by entitling themselves *Government Radicals*.”

“ Why Radicals ? Have you not just told me that they have repudiated their former opinions ?

“ *Repudiated* is not the exact term, as the immense majority of the electors are firmly attached to those opinions ; and the so-called *Government Radicals* have taken good care not to condemn them. They have confined themselves to merely declaring inopportune all

the reforms which awhile ago seemed to them the most urgent. So that, if they be also called *Opportunists*, it is absolutely by way of antiphrasis ; for they have raised Inopportunism to the dignity of a parliamentary institution."

Such would unquestionably be the reply of a man of good faith to a foreigner who might be curious to learn the situation of parties in France. It is summed up, moreover, in the ironical expression of Berryer, nearly half a century ago : "The liberal ministers are very rarely ministers of liberality."

The fact is that, since the first presidential election of M. Grévy, that is since 1879, the *Opportunists* have held power in an almost permanent fashion. And what have they done with it ? What reform have they carried out ? What abuses have they abolished ? What improvements have they accomplished ? Let us see :

Six years ago our budget showed a surplus of receipts of over two hundred millions. To-day it not only does not balance, but the surplus of receipts has disappeared to make way for a deficit so enormous that no one dare confess the exact figure.

Our army, reorganized at the cost of the most onerous sacrifices, is now cut up, dislocated, disorganized ; the plan for general mobilization cannot be carried into effect ; the defense of our territory is in a compromised condition ; and such is the squandering of the public treasure that there could not be found in the state treasury the few millions required for the casting of the fortress guns necessary to protect our territory from a surprise, possible at any moment, now that we have lost the line of the Rhine.

The French navy is in no better condition ; its vessels, worn out by a long cruise in the Chinese waters and the Indian seas, require immediate repairs which will cost many millions ; its arsenals are empty ; its marines and sailors worn out and decimated in Tonquin and Madagascar, to-day fill the hospitals and the cemeteries.

The leading public works are at a stand-still for want of money, or are intrusted to companies who content themselves with pocketing the profits, leaving the expense to be borne by the State ; the roads for rapid transit, the arteries along which flows the wealth that is the very life of nations, have just been handed over to railway companies under agreements the execution of which has been one of the gross scandals of the day.

Commerce and industrial pursuits crushed with taxes, ruined by transportation rates fabulously enormous, confess that they cannot hold their own with foreign competition.

Add to this, the creation of a multitude of needless offices which increase by nearly one hundred millions—one hundred millions (all must have read it)—the list of expenditures of the public administration ; the Catholic clergy raising their heads and becoming once more arrogant in proportion as they note the progress of the general discontent ; finally, the monarchical conspiracy succeeding in putting into the Chamber of Deputies two hundred of its bounden adherents, and proclaiming aloud its factious expectations ; and you will have a true picture of the results produced by five years of Opportunist government.

### III.

If the singular governors who have placed France in this sad state had merely betrayed their short-sightedness and want of skill, we might still forgive them the grave faults which they have committed, incapacity and weakness of mind never being considered criminal. But there can be no doubt that, in abandoning the traditional programme of the Republican party, in entangling the country in a disastrous adventure, the Opportunists have been governed by prepossessions that are purely personal, and which absolutely they dare not avow.

It is in this way that the annexation of Tunis had for its object and result to enrich a certain number of politicians whose names are known to all. The scheme was of the simplest, and it succeeded perfectly ; the French army went to Tunis under the pretext of putting a stop to the incursions of the Khroumirs ; the Regency was annexed, and the Tunisian debt charged to France. Immediately the bonds of this debt, which the grocers for a long time had been using to make superb bags of and the hair-dressers to work out pretty hair-papers, rose to par. Well, as the relatives and friends of Minister Ferry, forewarned of the lucky moment, had taken care to seize all these Tunisian securities which had not yet been sold to the old-papermen, we beheld all at once Deputies, who fifteen days previously had no soles to their boots and were pitilessly refused any credit by tailors, full of diffidence—we beheld these men buying real estate worth 600,000 francs, ordering from the sculptor Antonin Mercié statues of the most undoubted

Carrara marble, supporting in riches high-priced courtesans, and having carved by the jeweler Odiot silver services the cost of which represented at least ten years of parliamentary compensation.

This sudden metamorphosis did not come about without arousing some clamor. There were some journalists so indiscreet as to express astonishment at this sudden prosperity and to seek out the cause of it. One of these journalists was prosecuted, and his trial caused a great noise; the upper ranks of the administration, the diplomatic body, the army, made haste to testify against this abominable scribbler who allowed himself to denounce these little intrigues of men in office. But the jury acquitted the journalist, and it remains judicially settled that the Tunisian enterprise had been in reality only a shameless financial speculation, or, more properly speaking, a deliberate theft mixed with assassination, whose authors should have been brought before the Court of Assizes, instead of the journalist whom they had the barefacedness to prosecute.

Indeed MM. Ferry and Roustan had formed a partnership, the object of which was to bring down to the price of mere paper the securities of the Tunisian debt, and then buy them in for the price of a crust of bread.

It was to carry out this memorable swindle that thousands of our soldiers went to perish in Africa from sunstroke and want. The war in Tunis has been compared to that in Mexico. Surely enough they have an appearance of resemblance which binds Opportunism so well to Bonapartism. The history of the Tunisian bonds is, with but slight difference, that of the Jecker bonds. In each case it was a question of spilling French blood for the purpose of filling the coffers of a lot of impostors who were despoiling those whom they pretend to govern.

The comparatively easy carrying out of the Tunisian scheme had piqued the appetite of all the swindlers who have made Parliament a branch of the Bourse. Moreover, all appetites were not satisfied by any means. Among the knowing ones, for whom politics is only the art of becoming rich with the shortest delay possible, one awaited impatiently *une concession de mise*, another had in his pocket the plan of a railroad extremely oriental; there were two or three, all senators or deputies, who had in joint elaboration got up the statutes for a colonial bank without even

knowing for what colony they reserved the advantages of their genial concepts. Another influential personage, a sawbones from the college, dreamed of quitting the Academy of Sciences to go play viceroy beyond the seas ; finally, a general wished to have his devotedness rewarded with the gift of a command-in-chief.

In order to satisfy all these ambitious aspirations a new expedition was decided upon, that of Tonquin. I will not retrace its lamentable and bloody history ; it is fresh in the memory of all, both in Europe and in the New World. I will merely recall the shortsightedness with which this silly adventure was entered into and carried out. It was necessary to conquer, four thousand leagues from the coast of France, an immense empire of not less than 18,000,000 inhabitants ; and 400 men under the command of Captain Rivière were sent to do it.

The result of this foolhardy enterprise was easy to foresee. Rivière had his throat cut, and those of the French troops who had not fallen with him found themselves penned in Hanoi. Then, under pretext of avenging Rivière, fresh troops were sent to Tonquin, and more millions demanded of the Chamber. From that time forward the Radical press protested energetically against the blind policy which, while pretending to enrich France, was ruining her for a long time, and which sent soldiers to die in heaps on the banks of the Red River, while 2,000,000 German bayonets are gathered along the frontier of the Vosges.

A writer—the same who pens these lines—had predicted, three years ago, that this sad expedition would cost 500,000,000 and 50,000 men. This prediction, alas, has been but too well fulfilled. From one disaster to another, we finally reached that lame peace which, while constituting France guardian of public order in Tonquin, compels her to keep there a whole army corps, the costly maintenance of which weighs heavily on our finances.

It was at this conjuncture that the elections occurred from which came forth the present chamber. By making use of the unpardonable faults committed by the Opportunist faction, by posing as the friends of peace, by pointing to the Treasury empty and to the army disorganized, the Monarchists have succeeded in sending to the Chamber a somewhat large number of their representatives. But it is well to remember, that the form even of the government has not been for one single moment called in question ; and it is not the Republic which the country holds responsible for



the criminal follies of a coterie from whom it has been found necessary to wrest the power.

#### IV.

If the Liberal party has not done all it might and should have done to oppose a policy which it judged to be dangerous ; if at all times it has lacked energy and decision, at least it has not shared in the grave faults which have been committed during these last six years. It condemned the Tunisian enterprise, fought against the Tonquin expedition, pointed out the dilapidation of our finances, and protested against the disorganization of the Army. It is outside of it that party, and in spite of it that the government of the country, has been carried on since the resignation of President MacMahon. So its credit has increased throughout the country from year to year ; and at the last elections we have witnessed the Opportunist candidates themselves display the Radical colors in order to be nominated.

When M. Freycinet, last January, formed the cabinet which is now at the head of affairs, he understood without difficulty that he had to reckon upon the Radical groups which controlled a hundred votes in the Chamber, and he offered two portfolios to two members of the Extreme Left, MM. Lockroy and Granet.

It is true that, after making this concession, M. Freycinet deemed that he was all right with the Radicals, and quietly persisted in his Opportunist policy, which consists in governing the Republic with Monarchical laws.

There are subtle and pliant minds that never feel so much at ease as when living in dim light. M. de Freycinet is one of them.

We might apply to the system of government preferred by the President of the Council a saying of Victor Hugo's about the Clerical party. Victor Hugo said that the Clericals understand admirably well how to carry on a "government by lethargy." No formula could better characterise the method of M. de Freycinet. He has a genius for setting people asleep. No one knows better than he how to shuffle with difficulties, put off decision, toy with the Left without angering the Right, and by the power of insinuating subtlety secure the prolongation for months of a state of affairs, utterly impossible to any one else. This policy has only one defect ; but that is a capital defect, it is true : a politician who proposes to please every one can get along only by deceiving all parties,

one after the other. To do this he is bound to have no settled policy on any question ; that is the indispensable condition of his success. Keeping every one in suspense by making each one believe that perhaps his plan will be adopted—that is the policy to adopt. But, there always comes a time when each party demands the fulfillment of the promises made to it. Thiers for two years played this game of seesaw, and in spite of all his skill he ended in being caught in his own snares.

I do not know but that I may be mistaken ; but it seems to me that at the very time I write, the Freycinet Ministry is in a pretty bad way. What renders parliamentary government, so-called, as it is practised in France, a never-ending joke, is the mania which ministers have for keeping the knife constantly at the throat of the Chamber :

“There is what you must vote for, or we withdraw !”

Soliciting from the Chamber at every moment orders-of-the-day of confidence, is but to run to an inevitable fall within a specified time. You may be granted ten, twenty, and thirty. After that, if the majority refuses you a thirty-first, you find yourself compelled to give up your port-folios.

This is, perhaps, what will soon happen to the Freycinet Ministry, even though it has been supported for the last six months by the Parliamentary Radicals with a devotedness which at times has gone so far as to forget Republican principles. I will cite an illustration which has its importance ; for the fact of which I wish to speak has considerably changed the situation of the Radical party, and in the future will have incalculable consequences.

Last February, a strike broke out in the south of France, at Decazeville—a strike provoked, as always happens, by a reduction of wages. Supported by the whole Socialistic press, which at once hastened to open subscription-lists in their favor, the strikers resisted every attempt at intimidation ; and, at this very time, they have not resumed work. If during this long strike the peace has not been disturbed for one moment at Decazeville ; if there has been no blood shed, it is due (and this is incontestible) to the exhortations of two *Intransigent* journalists, MM. Ernest Roche, editor of the *Intransigent*, and Duc. Quercy, editor of the *Cri du Peuple*.

Both of them, for over two months, have never ceased to call

on the workmen to remain calm, and they ended by gaining over the strikers considerable influence.

Irritated by the continuance of this strike, which was injuring their interests, certain influential financiers persuaded the Ministry that it would suffice to make the miners resume their work immediately if Roche and Quercy were removed. One morning both journalists were brutally arrested and dragged in chains through the whole town. Some days afterward, in contempt of the most formal processes of law, a servile tribunal condemned MM. Roche and Quercy, contrary to all law and all justice, to fifteen months imprisonment, under the pretext that they had made an attack upon liberty to labor.

This unique sentence, which was applauded by the Opportunists and the Monarchists, aroused among the Radicals (even among those who, like M. Clémenceau, had never approved the attitude of MM. Roche and Quercy) a general indignation. Only however, that, while the "Parliamentary Radicals" were satisfied with formulating in their newspapers platonic protestations, the Socialist Radicals prepared to manifest, in a way to arrest attention, their too well founded discontent. The opportunity presented itself quite *à propos*. As a consequence of the resignation of M. Henri Rochefort, a deputy's seat became vacant at Paris. One of the two journalists arrested and condemned for the strike at Decazeville, M. Ernest Roche, was then nominated by all the branches of the Socialist party, they thus combining for the first time.

One might believe that all the "Parliamentary Radicals," of whom M. Clémenceau is the head, would not hesitate to rally to the support of this candidate, and would join in an absolutely pacific and entirely legal protestation. After some hesitation, however, and notwithstanding the very lively remonstrances of a large number of his friends, M. Clémenceau determined to set up an opposition candidate against the Socialist Radical.

The contest then began between M. Ernest Roche, supported by three journals only, and the candidate of M. Clémenceau, M. Gaulier, who united in his support all the Radical press, the benevolent neutrality of the Opportunist press, and the avowed complicity of the Ministry. Naturally, M. Gaulier was elected; but, contrary to all expectation, the Socialist candidate received over 100,000 votes, whereas the most favorable forecasts allowed him scarcely 60,000.

I have deemed it necessary to relate with some detail this electoral incident, because it was the point of departure for an absolutely new state of affairs, and the occasion of a break-up which I look upon as irrevocable.

In putting up a Radical candidate against the Socialist candidate, M. Clémenceau has sought to save the Ministry which he has been supporting for six months from getting a severe lesson and from experiencing a painful check, not deeming himself yet ready to receive his inheritance. It is not, moreover, the first sacrifice which the head of the "Parliamentary Radicals" has made for the Freycinet cabinet. A few months previously he had (always to please the ministries in power) contributed powerfully toward the rejection of an amnesty proposition in favor of political prisoners—a proposition which had been supported and demanded by the majority of advanced Republicans.

The result of the recent election in Paris was to cut the Radical party in twain. Undoubtedly M. Clémenceau has kept about him his faithful staff, all the deputies of whom he expects to make ministers and under-secretaries of state, or whose re-election he thinks he holds in his hands. But he has lost, and lost forever, part of his army—the most devoted portion and the most sincere. The political associations which thus far have been feeling his influence have left him, and fight openly against him; finally, in the very district which he has represented for fifteen years in the Chamber—Montmartre—M. Clémenceau is assailed in force by the Socialists.

## V.

A neat saying is reported of M. Clémenceau to M. Grévy, who was sounding him to learn whether he was disposed to assume power if the occasion should arise :

"But, M. le Président, do you want to make me put up my twenty-eight days?"

In the form of a pleasant repartee this is indeed a statement of the truth. For, it is evident that, for the first time since the Revolution, the "Parliamentary Radicals" will soon reach power in the person of M. Clémenceau and his friends. But it is no less certain that their management of affairs will be of short duration.

The Clémenceau ministry, in which there will certainly be places for M. Camille Pelletan, editor-in-chief of *La Justice*, an

orator of great talent and a very distinguished journalist, and for M. Charles Floquet, now President of the Chamber—this ministry will have at the very outset to struggle against the formidable coalition of the Monarchists and Opportunists. As a result, it is condemned from the start. On this point M. Clémenceau has no illusion ; but he at the same time knows that, whatever fate may await him in power, it is not possible for him to decline the offer which the President of the Republic is about to make him very soon. This explains the support, often not recognized, which the “Parliamentary Radicals” have given to the Freycinet cabinet: they supported it, at times against their feelings, so as not to be obliged prematurely to assume their onerous succession.

M. Clémenceau, who is subtle and pliant—for whose character, however, I have a particular esteem—has not perhaps all the qualities necessary for a statesman. He is a very remarkable debater, extremely witty, and full of resources ; he is not an orator in the parliamentary sense of the word. He frequently convinces ; he never carries one along with him. In private life he has courage equal to any emergency, but in many circumstances of his public life he has seemed to me to lack boldness and clearness of vision. Thus, on the Tonquin question, while criticising with surprising vigor and powerful argument that foolish and criminal expedition, he did not dare to declare himself in favor of the recall of our troops and the evacuation of the place—although at heart he sympathized with this idea.

So, also, on the question of amnesty for political crimes and misdemeanors, although firmly convinced of the necessity of such a measure of pacification and reparation, he did not assume that well defined and firm attitude which could have had an important influence on the result of the debate.

Finally, M. Clémenceau takes hold of public affairs with the apprehension that he cannot realize his own programme ; and this, to begin with, is an unfortunate condition to be in when one desires to achieve success in the end. The first reform to be carried out, the most essential one,—that is, the reduction of expenses,—can never be brought to a favorable issue except by an energetic and determined will. The minister who will essay to reduce the expenses of the administration, to suppress the countless unnecessary offices, will behold aroused against him that terrible storm of interests threatened by his measure, and the fury of the “bureaux.”

Now, with us (and I suppose it is the same with other people) what we call "bureaux" is, properly speaking, the government itself. Always, when ministers have reached power, they have pretended to be inspired with a spirit essentially reformatory; but, when asked to show what their reforms were, they have invariably replied :

"We have found it impossible to make any : the 'bureaux' have prevented us."

And they abandoned the reforms, instead of abandoning the "bureaux." So that France, in truth, for centuries, has not failed to be governed by office-holders with their black silk caps and sleeves of green *lustrine*.

This explains why the ambition of every minister has been constantly to get from the Chambers the largest possible budget. Every one of them, interpreting faithfully and with docility the wishes of the "bureaux," exclaims :

"Cut down all you choose from my colleagues, but it is impossible for me to allow one centime to be taken from my appropriation."

It would be at once a great satisfaction, and an immense surprise for the public in the end, to hear the head of the Interior Department, or of the Foreign Office, make a declaration such as this from the tribune :

"I used two hundred and fifty millions last year ; I beg of you earnestly to allow me only one hundred and ninety this year."

Will M. Clémenceau, when minister, use such language as this? I have no doubt that his intentions are very sincere. I have difficulty to believe that he will be allowed to do it.

Well, then, I repeat that such a reduction of expenses, at once so necessary and so difficult to accomplish, is the chief and the most urgent of all reforms in the present state of our finances. If I were to believe certain confidential statements made to me, M. Clémenceau's plan on reaching power would be to take hold of one of the following weighty questions : First, a modification of our financial system by laying a tax on income; second, the separation of church and state; third, to bring Paris back to common law and to communal autonomy.

M. Clémenceau will probably select the question of the separation of church and state, which is a ripe one, and will place it clearly before Parliament. And then, what? One of two things will

happen, either Parliament will agree to follow the minister in this path of radical reform, or, on the other hand (and M. Clémenceau expects this), he will be overthrown at the outset. In this case "he will fall to the Left," after having proved that he did not seek power for power's sake, but in order to carry out the ideas which he had developed while he was on the opposition benches.

An honorable withdrawal of this sort will restore to M. Clémenceau, without any doubt, some of the sympathy which his hesitating policy in latter times has estranged. But the break-up which has recently taken place between the Socialist Radicals and the Parliamentary Radicals is none the less thorough. The suffering masses, in fact, have scarcely any more faith in the advantage of political reforms; they take less and less interest in the questions debated before Parliament; and the claims for social reforms are making themselves heard in more and more formidable ways.

The Radicals, if called to power, will probably not maintain themselves there long; but we may rest assured that they will return to power, through the force of events, with a programme bolder and more revolutionary than the one they are about to essay. It is in the logic of things that the Radical party should inevitably return to power; for although sometimes it has been found possible to cook a dish from which the hare was entirely missing, the means have never yet been found to keep alive a democratic republic while constantly excluding from power the sincere and devoted republicans. The Opportunists, it is true, pretend that they also are republicans—at least, as much so as the Radicals; but it is difficult to attach the least importance to the opinions of those fine tricksters, who should tie a handful of straw to their conscience to show that it is always for sale.

HENRI ROCHEFORT.